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## REVIEWS OF BOOKS

### BOOKS OF MEDIEVAL AND MODERN EUROPEAN HISTORY

*Studies in English Official Historical Documents.* By HUBERT HALL, F.S.A., of H. M. Public Record Office. (Cambridge: University Press. 1908. Pp. xv, 404.)

*A Formula Book of English Official Historical Documents.* Part I., Diplomatic Documents. Edited by HUBERT HALL, F.S.A., of H. M. Public Record Office. (Cambridge: University Press. 1908. Pp. xvi, 170.)

It is generally recognized that with respect to the science of archives and the study of diplomatics the British Isles are far behind such countries as France and Germany. The central archives of England are, in spite of the mass of materials in private hands, fuller and richer than those of any other European country, and large sums have been spent in publishing or calendaring selected sets of documents; yet historical research is continually hampered by the absence of such tools as the French student possesses in the official *Inventaires* and in the comprehensive manuals of Langlois and Stein, while for the local archives a beginning of systematic effort has still to be made. In the field of diplomatics "English scholarship has toiled painfully in the wake of foreign science", and while some work of excellent quality has recently been done, great tracts of territory lie unexplored, and the English language can show no parallels to the manuals of Girard and Paoli and the German handbooks of diplomatics. Into this borderland between the domain of the historian and that of the archivist Mr. Hubert Hall has now ventured. As an official of the Public Record Office he has seen the problems of the scores of British and foreign investigators who have come to him for counsel and guidance, and as a lecturer at the London School of Economics he has given systematic instruction in palaeography and diplomatics and organized the efforts of his students in co-operative enterprises of permanent value. The results of this experience he here seeks to make available in a volume on English official documents of an historical character, considered under the three aspects of archives, diplomatics, and palaeography. As is inevitable in so vast and so little cultivated a field, the book disclaims anything like completeness or finality—its author even calls it a "collection of desultory studies"—but it covers a wide range of topics compactly and from the sources, and is everywhere suggestive and full of meat. Some topics are dismissed too briefly and some not touched—we miss,

for example, an account of medieval formularies and a discussion of the early history of the practice of enrollment—but there is much pioneer work, and a book of this sort should be welcomed for what it does contain rather than criticized for what it does not.

The first part treats of the history, classification, and analysis of English archives, and is accompanied by a number of valuable appendices illustrating various phases of the subject. The author pleads throughout for a structural and analytic classification of public records instead of the more or less accidental system which has come to prevail, and he insists that each historical problem be approached by seeking to determine first of all what materials once existed for its study and what were their relations. His emphasis upon the importance of viewing the sources as a whole and taking account even of those which have disappeared will come as a surprise to those to whom historical investigation means simply an unreflecting search through catalogues and calendars. Dilettante methods of study are also responsible for the neglect of whole classes of material. "The historians of every country in the past have displayed a notorious lack of initiative in the discovery of materials"; and "whilst time and money and still more precious scholarship have been lavished upon the publication and republication of historical texts which possess a conventional or a sensational interest, comparatively little attention has been paid to the outlying sources". A most interesting object lesson in the value of the less obvious documents would be the arrangement and publication of all of the records of the English central and local government during some representative year.

The treatment of palaeography is brief and sketchy, but the section on diplomatics fills half the volume and is of interest to the student of constitutional and legal history as well as to the professed devotee of the auxiliary sciences. Mr. Hall interprets the term official record broadly, including not only writs and charters but state papers, departmental instruments, surveys, inquisitions, accounts and judicial proceedings; and while the continental background is not forgotten, he shows the nature of the distinctly English types and brings together a mass of information for which we should look in vain in the foreign manuals. Almost every page reveals the gaps in our knowledge and the absence of that monographic investigation of English topics which is a necessary prerequisite to such comparative studies as have recently been attempted in Erben's *Urkundenlehre* and in the *Archiv für Urkundenforschung*. At no point is this need greater than in the Anglo-Saxon period, and we should be especially grateful to Mr. Hall for his courage in essaying a provisional treatment without awaiting the volume which has been so long expected from Mr. W. H. Stevenson. A critical sifting of the Anglo-Saxon charters is one of the most pressing needs of historical scholarship, for "they are still, to the great majority of students, merely typographical abstractions of constitutional, eco-

nomic or philological interest, to be taken as they are found, with such casual reservations as it has pleased a few inquiring minds to propound". The question whether a charter has been preserved in the original or in a copy has rarely been raised, and no systematic examination has been made of the habits and interests of the various religious establishments in the matter of forgeries. The grouping of charters by monastic houses, which has long been the practice of continental critics, is the more necessary in England if we grant Mr. Hall's negative conclusions respecting the Old English chancery. He finds no sound evidence of a royal chancellor or notary before the Conquest—"Regenbald priest and chancellor" becomes a simple priest at his hands—or even of the sealing of charters, as distinguished from writs; and while "there is abundant evidence of a highly developed style of diplomatic composition", in "this primitive age the grantee drew his own grant and obtained its ratification by his personal supervision and supplication, supplemented on occasion by a judicious offering. . . . The Old English charter is a religious and a local product. The handwriting is local, the language is local, the formulas are adopted by local scribes from academic models; the attestation only is official, inasmuch as the court by which it is ratified followed the king into the locality".

The *Formula Book*, originally planned as an appendix to the *Studies*, to which it is the natural complement, is the work of Mr. Hall's seminary at the London School of Economics. Seven students collected and transcribed the documents, while the labor of direction and editorship was performed by Mr. Hall. The result is a handbook of two hundred and twenty-five classified specimens of English official documents, ranging in date from the eighth to the nineteenth centuries and forming a collection at once more convenient and more scientific than the *Formulare* of Madox with which the student has hitherto been obliged to content himself. Besides the examples of individual types, the editor has at certain points brought together a series of writs or letters which show a connected sequence of transactions, as in the grant of letters patent to Connecticut in 1661-1662. The method of printing the documents will not command universal assent. No indication is given where words have been extended, and the device of representing Latin final *ae* by *é* could prove of assistance to the unpractised reader, only if it were generally followed in medieval texts. Mr. Hall's use of the term original for such early copies as Nos. 1 and 8 is apt to mislead, and his annotation of Henry I.'s charter concerning the local courts (No. 16) could have profited by Professor Adams's commentary in an earlier number of this journal.

A second part is in preparation, comprising "formulas of surveys, inquisitions, accounts, and of such judicial records as chiefly lend themselves to diplomatic study".

CHARLES H. HASKINS.